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VI.—LITERATURE AND PERSONALITY.<sup>1</sup>

While the Germans have long recognized a *Litteraturwissenschaft*, we do not often speak in English of a 'science of literature.' Do we then lack something which the Germans have, or do they lack something which they think they have? Do we feel that the name is a misnomer? Or is it that we are satisfied to possess the *thing* without caring how it is called? If this last is so, it were as well perhaps to be a little less indifferent, since names gradually affect modes of thinking. A rose by any other name will smell as sweet, but a rose by the name of rose tempts people to smell of it, especially blind people. It is a fact of some import for the users of German, that they have the convenient word *Wissenschaft*, which they can apply freely to the serious and systematic study of any subject under the sun. On the other hand, we are not unaffected, and I think the effect is bad, by the drift of English usage toward a restricted application of the word 'science.' The tendency leads people to associate with that word not so much the grand ideals of carefulness and love of truth, as rather the particular methods employed, and the kind of accu-

<sup>1</sup>Address of the President of the Modern Language Association of America, at its Annual Meeting, held at Cleveland, December, 1896.

racy aimed at, in the study of physics and biology. Many are also led to feel that there are spheres of thought in which science has nothing to say; and so, instead of enlarging their conception of science, they become suspicious of it. The result is that we are far from realizing that universal allegiance to the scientific spirit, which in our day we ought to have. Instead, there is a division of sentiment, many persons, intelligent persons too, feeling that for certain purposes science is a blind guide. As if there could be in the long run any better basis of life than the truth! And as if there could be any more hopeful way of getting at the truth than to keep trying, with all our might, in the light of all the evidence!

Nevertheless, the division of sentiment to which I have referred exists and a phase of it is found right in our own camp. On the one side are the men of letters and those whom they inspire, looking a little disdainfully upon the patient plodding, the extreme circumspection, of the philologists,<sup>1</sup> and teaching by example that the important thing in dealing with literature is, as M. Tissot expresses it, 'to talk well rather than to think well.'<sup>2</sup> Their ideal of the literary discourse tends toward the elegant *causerie*, which is apt to be interesting but not true. On the other hand, the philologists feel that what the literary men say consists pretty largely of cunningly-phrased guess-work, superficiality and personal bias. For their part they wish their work to rest on good foundations. It is the solidity of the fabric, not its beauty, that they care for. Thus they are tempted as a class (for every class has its besetting danger) to undervalue form and to confine themselves to somewhat mechanical investigations, such as promise definite, exact and unassailable results. They are suspicious of the larger and more subtle questions of litera-

<sup>1</sup> I use the word 'philologist' to denote the type of the investigator, in distinction from the *littérateur*.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Évolutions de la Critique Française*, p. 63: Jusque dans cette préoccupation de la forme trahie par la recherche de la diction—je retrouve l'esprit moderne qui a plus soin de bien dire que de bien penser.

ture; and so their ideal gravitates in the direction of the amorphous *Abhandlung* which is apt to be true but not interesting.

Now I am not guilty of supposing that a new and better era would dawn at once if we were all to commence talking about the 'science of literature.' In what I said a moment ago I only meant to drop the suggestion that if we were more familiar with the phrase, perhaps that very familiarity might help a little to the better realization of what the phrase implies. But I do not urge the value of the suggestion and I frankly admit that it does not loom up very large in my own field of vision. Meanwhile what we are all interested in is the thing, if not the name; and it is about that, or some aspects of it, that I purpose to speak. You see I assume that there is such a thing as literary science. Its object is to explain literature—not simply the bones, but the soul of literature. Of course we know that this is a hard task which will never be finished. Until our planet shall freeze up literature will no doubt continue to tease the thinking mind with new problems and to suggest fresh explanations. Probably our latest descendants will occasionally be taken in, even as we are, by crude theories and wrong deductions. But we need not be too much saddened by such considerations. A similar fate awaits all branches of science, including those which we call by courtesy 'exact.'

For the purposes of scientific study a literary production presents three main aspects. We may regard it, first, as a link in the chain of historical development, fixing our attention upon its relation to antecedent conditions and inquiring into the provenience of the factors that compose it. Secondly, we may regard it as an artistic fact in itself. Our aim will then be to explain its character and describe the effect it produces. In the third place, we may look at it as the product and the expression of personality, incidentally also as a link in the chain of personal development. I do not say that no other aspects are possible, nor that these three can always be

kept, or need to be kept, distinct. In some cases too the one or the other may be unimportant, or hidden from view, as is, for example, the personal aspect of the *Nibelungenlied*. It is enough that these are the three main lines along which the study of literature has been and is likely to be most fruitful.

Nothing is more characteristic of the scientific intellect in our time than its habit of looking at things under the aspect of development. Indeed, so fixed and so instinctive has this habit become that we should be justified in calling it *the* scientific habit *par excellence*. Whatever the matter that interests us, the first question we ask is, How came the thing to be what it is? We are interested in beginnings and in bit-by-bit evolutions. Under the influence of this historical spirit we have taught ourselves to look upon literature as the outgrowth and the register of ever-changing conditions, and hence as a connected series of social documents in which to read the spiritual history of large masses of people. This interest in conditions is connected with the two most momentous facts in the political history of the century now drawing to a close, the development on the one hand of nationalism and on the other of socialism. The effect of the drift is obvious. It leads us to emphasize the social and the national aspect of literature. We are very much concerned about general tendencies and movements, the action and reaction of social forces, the formation of schools and isms, the flocking of large numbers this way or that. Persons interest us for their relation to these generalities. We study authors for the purpose of labeling them, and if they refuse to fit in the boxes prepared for them, we resort to Procrustean surgery. I use the pronoun 'we' in a spirit of urbane condescension to sinners. Of course I do not really mean you nor myself.

The historical method, which received its first impetus not from the late-born Frenchman Taine, but from the great German pathfinder, Herder, was begotten in the spirit of opposition to literary dogmatism; more specifically, opposition to the worship of canons assumed to be absolute, but in

reality themselves the product of national tradition. Finding that certain writers spoke of Homer, Sophocles and Aristotle as if these names stood for perfection, for the ideal which modern nations had simply to copy after as best they might, Herder interposed the consideration that the Greeks were simply the Greeks. Each nation's poetry and its rules of poetry were determined by the national tradition and environment, and were to be judged accordingly. Since no two peoples had the same tradition and environment, one could not possibly be a norm for another. The greatest glory of each was to be itself.

This doctrine, with all its far-reaching implications, has become for us a fundamental postulate. No one now thinks of judging Shakespeare, for example, by standards that were not *his* standards. But does it then follow that judgment, or criticism in the old etymological sense, is out of place in the scientific interpretation of literature? A strict determinism seems to lead to this conclusion. If an author or his book is the inevitable outcome of antecedent conditions, is it not folly to blame or praise him for being what he could not help being? There is nothing to do apparently but to explain and describe. One does not find fault with Niagara for being where it is, or for not being higher; and if any one says that he is or is not impressed by it, we set that down as a matter of taste which tells us something about the observer, but nothing at all about the cataract. There are some writers of our day who seem to have taken a through ticket on the deterministic route, and tell us, in effect, that all criticism is an impertinence. I quote from one of them:<sup>1</sup> "Our sole aim should be to know, and as invariably any expression of surprise is nothing more than a confession of ignorance, our blame can merely come from a lack of knowledge of all the facts and the same must be true of our praise. The highest quality of human nature is comprehension, which is a placid quality."

<sup>1</sup> T. S. Perry, *From Opitz to Lessing*, p. 58.

Is this sound? Will the critics be forced out of business in the good time coming? And must we give them their walking-papers in the name of science? I do not think so. It does not seem to me a betrayal of the scientific spirit to use one's judgment, if one has such a thing, or to express one's opinion, provided the opinion has been carefully formed according to the evidence. We must not be misled by the analogy of natural phenomena. Between Niagara Falls and *Hamlet*, for example, there is at least one momentous difference; and that is that the latter has in it an element of purpose. To find out what that purpose is and whether the work does or does not accomplish its end, is a perfectly legitimate scientific enterprise. The play was meant to excite certain emotions. What emotions? Does it succeed? If so, how? If not, why not? Where does the fault lie? These, so far as I can see, are just as strictly scientific questions as any that can be imagined; but no one can do anything with them without calling into play his aesthetic judgment. On the other hand, if there is any purpose in Niagara, it is at any rate hidden from our view. We have no reason to suppose that the Falls were meant to arouse feelings of awe and admiration in the human biped. If we had, an aesthetic opinion of them would come quite within the purview of science. Of course opinions might differ, but experts differ about all sorts of things. They may disagree about the strength of a bridge or the height of a tower.

I am arguing simply that admiration and disapproval are not necessarily unscientific. In the realm of natural science, no doubt, comprehension is a "placid quality," if one choose to call it a quality at all; but how can one be placid and comprehend a great poem? The poem is meant to move, and unless one is moved by it one does not really comprehend it as literature at all. Literary criticism is rightly conceived, it seems to me, as the science of the emotional effects produced by literature. If this is so, then the critic's capacity for admiration is the organ by which he apprehends the facts

with which he must deal. If he lacks such an organ, or has a poor one, he can not talk knowingly of literature. He is a deaf man discoursing of music. But if he has the organ why should he not report his impressions, when his impressions are intimately bound up with his comprehension? Is it that another and another may be impressed differently, and there is no court of appeal to decide between conflicting opinions and tell us which is right? This is a matter worth looking into somewhat closely, for it must be admitted, I think, that there are no universal canons of literary excellence. The poem which delights you or me will leave an educated Chinese quite cold; and if we tried to explain the grounds of our admiration we should probably make little impression on his mind. We should find that *our* associations of literary beauty, power and value were quite different from his. And even among the occidental nations that have a large common inheritance there are no general and immutable standards, though education has done much to create a common basis of feeling. Thus an Englishman, a German and an Italian may read a book of the *Iliad*, each in his own way, and all get pleasure from it, though a pleasure quite different in quality from that aroused in their hearers by the old Ionian rhapsodists. But is the heroic hexameter beautiful in itself? Is it adapted to German or English poetry? These are questions upon which the wise will at once begin to disagree. Is the Alexandrine verse good for dramatic dialogue? The Frenchman will probably say 'yes,' the Englishman 'no,' because their aesthetic sense in this sphere has been trained upon different models. So too the stylistic and spiritual qualities which we admire in literature appeal to us usually through personal experience and education. Whether one is to find joy and edification in Wordsworth, for example, will depend largely on the road one has privately travelled in religion and philosophy. Who can tell how far our liking for the literary quality of the English bible depends upon purely religious associations? Are there any qualities of style which are always and everywhere



good? Is lucidity, for instance, such a quality? One can not say so. Poetry often charms us by its very lack of lucidity. Perfect clearness would spoil it.

In short, one's taste in literature is very largely a matter of national and individual peculiarity. It does not follow a logic which is valid for all mankind, but grows out of temperament, education and experience. There is no objective test of rightness; indeed, we can associate no idea with the phrase 'correct taste' except the idea of conformity to a certain fashion. The political economists sometimes talk of the 'economic man,' meaning a human abstraction conceived as having nothing in the world to do but to move naturally under the impact of economic laws. If we do not hear of a corresponding aesthetic man, I suppose it is because wisdom from on high would be needed to tell how such a man would act in a given case.

But conceding that the critic's opinion can settle nothing for those who do not agree with him, does it follow that his opinion is an impertinence from the scientific point of view? Certainly not if it is a faithful record of honest feeling. If we think of criticism as the science of the effects produced by literature, what can be more relevant than a description of these effects, with the greatest possible precision and minuteness, in a particular case? For the effect of literature is not produced upon humanity in the abstract, but always upon individual souls. The feelings of men and women with regard to books or, to speak in the jargon, their emotional reactions under the stimulus of literature, are facts which have the same right as other facts, to be carefully recorded and studied for such instruction as they may be capable of yielding. In the aggregate they constitute the evidence by which we must estimate the *power* of literature, its power to impress and to edify. It is of course essential to this view of the matter that the critic be honest in reporting the state of his mind. Let him tell how he is actually impressed, and regard this as more important than to tell how other people ought to be impressed.

If he does this he will perform a service in any event, and a great service if he has the advantage of wide knowledge and delicate sensibility. His first virtue is breadth. He should know what there is to be known about that which he assumes to judge, should let his mind play freely about it, and be patient in the search for light. And then his second virtue is candor; he should tell the truth as he feels it, resisting every temptation to sacrifice this truth to rhetorical point, to the turn of a phrase, to wit or humor, to any didactic aim, to the fashion of his time or his coterie. When he begins to sophisticate and to think less of the truth of what he is saying than of its effect upon his own reputation for sagacity or literary cunning, then, indeed, he parts company with the scientific spirit.

I should be sorry if any one were to draw from what I have just been saying the inference that I undervalue the graces of style in criticism. Far from it. My point is simply that the ideal of perfection in style is not opposed to but in harmony with the ideal of all science, namely, a continual approximation to the truth, the greatest possible fidelity to the facts. But the facts with which we have to do in aesthetic criticism are of a subjective nature; they consist of feelings to be recorded. Of course we can not draw a rigid line between feelings and thoughts. They run together inextricably so that the critic will often find occasion to explain, to argue and even to dogmatize. But his true function, his highest function, is to report feelings with nicety. The other things are ancillary to that. Now other things being equal he is the best stylist who can best seize upon his own more subtle thoughts and feelings, his nicer observations and discriminations, the more delicate promptings of his aesthetic sense,—who can best seize upon these elusive things, disentangle them, find precise expression for them and present them effectively so that another may think and feel them after him and verify his statements. Take Macaulay and Matthew Arnold, for example. How can we better describe the difference between them than by saying that

Arnold, besides being more discriminating, cares more for the subjective truth of what he says. But are not discrimination and truthfulness precisely the highest of scientific virtues?

I come now to that other aspect of literary study, which our printed program invites you to regard as the proper subject of this address. Literature is the expression of personality and may be studied for the purpose of comprehending personality. There are many proper studies of mankind besides man, but none is more instructive, none more difficult; and not the least of the factors which render it so instructive and so difficult is the simple truth that, do what we will, personality can never be made to appear entirely inevitable. It comes upon us with the effect of something new in the world, something not fully deducible from the past. It has a way of eluding our formulae. With astonishing recalcitrancy it often refuses to belong to its own school, to move with its own movement and to conform to the ism which has been named after it. Plato was no Platonist, Byron was much more than Byronic, nor is Ibsen an Ibsenite.

Let me not be misunderstood. From the view-point of pure theory I am a good enough determinist. Nothing happens without a cause and this law is just as inexorable in the domain of psychology as elsewhere. Had we a complete record of all the pertinent facts, any man's character would be like an open scroll. We could draw the curve of his personality, account for his traits and his doings and even predict how he would act under the influence of given conditions. And nowhere would there be any room for surprise or admiration except, indeed, such as we may feel in presence of purely physical phenomena. But this is only a way of saying that if men were gods, things would be different. We have no such record of the facts that make up personality and we can not possibly get it. The web is too fine and intricate for our unraveling. Many of the things we should need to know in any given case will always be lacking through mere imperfection of the record. Many more will be hope-

lessly beyond our reach, because, from their very nature, they do not admit of precise recording. And then, worst of all perhaps, we are ever more in danger of being misled by facts which have the unfortunate peculiarity of not being so. And thus it comes about that personality is always more or less incalculable. Examine the political, social and religious conditions of Germany in the eighteenth century as much as you will; study the city of Frankfurt, into which Goethe was born; scrutinize his ancestry as far back as you can trace it; take account of every discernible influence that affected him at each stage of his life,—and what have you got? No doubt much that is worth knowing, but you have not got the secret of the man's individuality. That is something that defies your synthetic efforts. The conditions noted will be seen to have been for the most part general conditions that affected also a large number of other men. At the beginning of every life there is a certain something, call it if you will the form of the individual, which has for our minds at least the quality of an original datum, which we can not get behind. An oak tree and a beech grow side by side, nourished by the same soil and air, exposed to the same winds and rains. Evidently the essential difference between the two can not be accounted for by these conditions. Nor can it be cleared up by the microscopic or the chemical study of an acorn and a beechnut. We can not produce an acorn by putting together the materials of which it is composed in the form which mother Nature seems to prescribe. The oakiness of the tree depends upon starting with an acorn.

There are some well-known verses in which Goethe himself touches upon this subject. After referring one of his traits to his father, another to his mother and others to remote ancestors, he concludes with the rueful query :

Sind nun die Elemente nicht  
Aus dem Complex zu trennen,  
Was ist denn an dem ganzen Wicht  
Original zu nennen ?

What now is the right answer to this question? Simply this, as it seems to me: Nothing *in* the entire wight can boast of originality, but the entire wight is original. The momentous facts of heredity are there and must be reckoned with. In a certain true sense we *are* our ancestors. They live in us. But we are also something more, something different; not because a miracle has intervened, but because the elements derived from the past have entered into a new combination and in combining have given rise to a product that is unique; just as atoms may unite chemically and form a new substance the properties of which are not determinable from the elements composing it. Strictly speaking, this is true of every personality, however humble. It appears in the world as a new aggregate of qualities, tendencies and capacities. As such it goes its own way and preserves its own being. If comprehended at all, it must be comprehended as an entirety.

Now the comprehension of personality in its entirety and its *Eigenart*, is one of the hardest things in the world. Ideally what we have to do seems perhaps easy enough, being simply to see the facts just as they were and let them work upon us naturally. But we can not help seeing them in a perspective of our own. Some will seem to us more important, others less; and by pressing those which seem more important and slighting those which seem less, we are easily led to distort the true relation of things. We bring to the study of an author a mass of prepossessions from which we can not escape if we would. Then perhaps there is a pet theory to exploit or some one else's theory to explode. A bit of a discovery may afflict us with temporary myopia. You will say perhaps that these are only the well-known sources of subjective error which have to be guarded against in all scientific study whatever, and this is true. But in dealing with personality one has especial need of vigilant self-discipline, because one inevitably brings to his work, or soon develops, a certain amount of sympathy or antipathy. One *must* be a partisan in a greater or less degree. If you try to look at Luther,

say, with cool impartiality, you will run a great risk of not really *seeing* Luther at all. A certain measure of heat is necessary in order to comprehend *his* heat. Not that one must be passionately interested at this late day in all the sixteenth-century questions that disturbed his soul; but one must have so trained his historical imagination by aid of the documents that one can look at Luther's world through Luther's eyes. When that has been done it will be impossible to avoid taking sides for or against him, and the attitude assumed will color one's entire estimate of the man.

This brings me to consider the question whether the scientific spirit in its most perfect manifestation is incompatible with a respect for persons. A distinguished German scholar, Hermann Paul, expresses the opinion that the *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, because it takes regard for an individual as the starting-point of investigation, occupies a position for which there is no longer any justification.<sup>1</sup> Now I hold no brief for the editor of the *Jahrbuch*, but to my mind this is a very hard saying. Is it the idea that the starting-point ought to be regard for truth in the abstract rather than for a person? If this be what is meant one can only ask: Why? What difference can it make what the starting-point of the inquiry is provided the result of it is to promote accurate knowledge? When Saul found his kingdom it was no less a kingdom because he set out to look for his father's asses. It is a familiar fact that the most valuable scientific discoveries are often stumbled upon accidentally in the course of a search for something else. Our concern is not with the starting-point, but with the method and the results.

Or does Professor Paul mean that regard for truth and regard for a person are in some way incompatible? Does he

<sup>1</sup> *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie*, I, 138: So zeigt sich, z. B., die Vermischung von strenger Wissenschaft und Dilettantismus in dem seit 1880 von Ludw. Geiger herausgegebenen *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, welches manche willkommene Gabe gebracht hat, aber denn doch, indem es die Verehrung für die einzelne Person zum Ausgangspunkt für die Forschung nimmt, einen Standpunkt vertritt, der jetzt überwunden sein sollte.

fear that admiration of Goethe will so warp the mind of his admirers that they will be unable to deal critically with him? That they will be apt, for example, to treat unimportant scraps of writing as important simply because they are his or pertain to him? That they will be predisposed to magnify his virtues and to ignore or condone his shortcomings? Well, these dangers no doubt exist and many there are who have fallen into them. It is necessary to be on one's guard. But is it then impossible to admire a man in a large way without losing one's head when it comes to dealing with particular phases of his life and work? I trow not; and I would undertake to prove by notable examples, if it seemed worth while, that admiration often co-exists with the most perfect critical equipoise. And there is this further consideration. One who is intimately familiar with the life and works of Goethe will either like or dislike the man—indifference is not to be thought of. The question then reduces to this: Whether love or hate gives the better guaranty of judicial fairness. Now for myself I vote unreservedly for love. We are less likely to be stampeded by sympathy than by antipathy. It is certain that the friends of Goethe have written much nonsense about him; but more and worse nonsense has been written by his enemies.

It is just possible, however, that I have not yet hit upon the real grounds on which our austere methodologist meant to condemn a journal specially devoted to the study of one man. Perhaps he meant to teach that before the bar of science it is not the man that counts, but only his books, his ideas, his style, his tendency, his relation to the movements of his time. If this be what is meant and is to be taken as a part of the orthodox creed, then I must confess myself a heretic. Why should not a personality, especially a unique and commanding personality like that of Goethe, be an object of scientific interest for its own sake? If it is scientific to care for the life-history of a bug or a worm, why not for that of a man? It may be urged, perchance, that nothing is literary science

which does not aim primarily at the explanation of literature. Granted ; but the works of Goethe are the product and the expression of his personality and this is for many precisely their most interesting and instructive aspect. The works and the life are indissolubly bound up together and what makes for a better knowledge of the man must make in the long run for a better understanding of the works. Of course it does not follow that everything produced by him or left on record by those who knew him is important or has even a possible value. The laborious collection of his unfinished fragments and sketches, his rejected verses, the chips from his workshop, his trivial correspondence, his dinner-bills and freight-bills, the record of his goings and comings, the gossip of his friends and enemies, his chronicles of small beer—is a business which he himself would have preferred to characterize through the mouth of Mephistopheles. Indeed he has made use of that very organ for that very purpose :

Noch immer glücklich aufgefunden !  
Die Flamme freilich ist verschwunden,  
Doch ist mir um die Welt nicht leid.  
Hier bleibt genug Poeten einzuweihen,  
Zu stiften Gild- und Handwerksneid ;  
Und kann ich die Talente nicht verleihen,  
Verborg' ich wenigstens das Kleid.

These are precious words which the latter-day *Goethe-Forscher*, in their arduous pursuit of the infinitely little, would do well to bear in mind and say over occasionally in order to preserve their sense of humor and of proportion. But after all the question has another side, which warns us while enjoying the devil's fun not to take him for an oracle of perfect wisdom. When a man has acquired in the totality of his work and influence the importance which Goethe possesses for modern Germany, so that he is constantly studied by multitudes from every point of view and for the most diverse purposes, who can wisely set limits to the publication of material concerning him ? What seems trivial and worth-



less to one will often prove useful to some one else. One can not always tell in advance. Upon the whole there is less danger of going too far than of not going far enough. The man does not live who could safely be trusted to winnow the material relating, say, to *Faust*, with a view to destroying all that in his opinion could never by any possibility be of use.

Thus far then we have found no solid basis for the general dogma that regard for a person is an unworthy incentive in literary study, though there is no denying that it *may* lead to uncritical habits. Everything will depend, as it seems to me, upon the spirit in which the study is carried on. If it is mere blind hero-worship, bent on the burning of incense rather than the promotion of exact knowledge, then of course it is unscientific. Not so, however, if it proceeds from a deliberate conviction, based on fact and argument, that the man is worth studying more closely than most men because of the exceptional importance of his personality. This is a perfectly legitimate attitude which requires no sacrifice of scientific *acribia*. For a man may be greater than his productions, as is actually the case with the man we have been considering. My interest in Goethe, at any rate, is something quite different from the sum total of the interest I feel in the separate volumes of his works. One may go through the works in a critical spirit, as Prof. Dowden did lately in an article published in the *Cosmopolis*, and find pretty serious defects in all of them. *Götz* is certainly weak on the side of dramatic construction. *Werther* is a sentimental tale which, I fancy, few of us would care to read at the present time if its authorship had chanced to remain unknown. *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* are elegant exponents of high culture, charming in style and correct in form ; but they are not powerful dramas. *Meister* and the *Elective Affinities* are much too straggling and discursive for good novels. The best friend of Goethe can easily read himself to sleep in either of them. And as for *Faust*, all the world knows how full of faults that is when tried by the conventional canons. Of course there are in each case countervailing considerations which a fair criticism

will always take into account. But in the end it will have to be admitted that the great works of Goethe are each and all rather vulnerable. Of themselves they hardly suffice to account for the commanding position which has been accorded him among modern writers, nor for the deep and abiding interest taken in him by a vast multitude of thoughtful men in all parts of the world.

What then is the explanation? Simply this, as I conceive: That behind the works at every stage is a pre-eminently original and powerful personality. It is this personality in its entire development, in the totality of its manifestation from first to last, that interests us. Napoleon's *Voilà un homme* was not the dictum of a hero-worshipper, but of an eminently cool observer; and it suggests a perfectly scientific point of view for you and me. One may outgrow the works of Goethe or become indefinitely cool toward them as did their author himself, who said in 1825 that he could hardly read any of them with delight except *Hermann and Dorothea*; which certainly would not suffice in itself for a foundation of first-class literary renown. But what one never outgrows who has once come under the fascination of it, is the personality that informs the works. Not that this personality is in any sense canonical. It is not only unscientific, but contrary to Goethe's own spirit, to treat any man as an embodiment of perfection; for there are no such men and his central maxim was to see things just as they are. Now any one who essays to see Goethe just as he was, in his relation to times and places, to men and women, to art, science, and philosophy, in the varying phases of his experience from youth to age, will find like the psalmist that "his feet have been set in a large room." And when he has made himself at home there by patient study, he will see that the works appear in a new light and derive a large part of their importance from their relation to personal vicissitudes.

I have been led to speak at length of Goethe in particular, partly because the dogma of Paul, which I have been criticis-

ing, had reference to the study of Goethe, and partly because his case illustrates very forcibly the line of thought which I wished to present. But the case is by no means unique. On the contrary I think it may be said that every great writer is more than his books and is most instructive through his individuality. How true this is of Lessing, for example. The fame of Lessing to-day rests mainly on two plays and two contributions to criticism. But one may read these works carefully and find himself at the end quite unable to understand the saying of Hettner: *Dem Deutschen geht das Herz auf, wenn er von Lessing redet.* *Minna von Barnhelm* is a fairly good play of its kind, but where are its elements of immortal greatness? Put it beside *As You Like It* and how dim is the light with which it shines! *Nathan* is richer in elements of permanent interest, but chiefly because of its religious import. Apart from this its artistic quality is not very high, and its religious import interests us largely—I do not say exclusively—because of its relation to Lessing's individuality and personal history. The *Hamburg Dramaturgy* and the *Laokoon* are characterized by great logical acumen and by great learning, but not pre-eminently by critical equipoise. They are the works of a brilliant attorney rather than of a wise judge. But is Lessing really summed up for those who know him well by any such coarse and general verdicts as these? Not at all. The man is more than the works and the works, if one would read them to the best advantage and comprehend their full significance, must be read in the light of biography.

According to my best insight, then, the interest we all instinctively feel in personality is not something to be repressed, but something to be made much of in our pursuit of the science of literature. And that simply in the interest of truth. Occupied, as we are apt to be very largely, with the generalities of historical and aesthetic criticism, we are always more or less in danger of being fooled by half-truths and of getting wrong mental images. Against this danger the best protection is a lively interest in personality. Who

has not had some such experience as this? One has read a little of some author, a very little, perhaps, but a great deal about him,—in the histories of literature, in books of reference, in popular essays and critiques. One thinks he understands the man, perchance one even has the temerity to lecture about him. Then one day, for some reason or other, one is led to take up the author in earnest, to read all that he wrote and to make a thorough study of his life and character. And now one finds that one's former ideas were mostly wrong. What one knew was really not worth knowing. Thus does grey theory play havoc with the green tree of life, and admonish us in our 'critical endeavor' to keep as close as we can to concrete realities.

A man, if he is worth studying at all, is nearly always more interesting and instructive than the cleverest abstraction that can be framed about him. And then the study of personality has a useful effect on the student himself; it keeps the mind flexible, prevents it from growing mechanical. I am not trying to justify literary idolatry—it is not a question of hero-worship, but of comprehension. We have got rid of all the supernaturalism that used to cluster about the idea of genius and have resolved the old mystery into more or less commonplace elements, like energy, capacity for work, openness to experience, power of expression. But we have not thereby done away with the difference between genius and common mortality. The difference is not infinite; we can pass from the one to the other by easy gradations. But after all the difference is very great and we should recognize it in a whole-souled way, while doing what we may to account for it by the study of conditions and dependences. All honor to the science of historical interpretation! But when it has done its utmost to account for genius as the product of circumstances, it will still remain true that genius is a reality. The primates of the mind are there and one of the noblest functions of literature is to reveal them as they were.